



INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

NSW Chapter

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Dear Members,

In this issue you will find the details of two further talks for the year, the Work in Progress which will be held in person at the Flinders Room at the State Library on 1 November and the Zoom *Doing Research* meeting on Friday 22 November. We also have the ISAA Annual Conference to look forward to in Canberra in October (see box below). Details of the program and how to register have been sent out. Since the last *Bulletin* ISAA NSW has a new member, Dennis Dorwick (Mortdale) whose interests are in music and literature.

Planning for 2025 is under way. We are planning a workshop on *The Power of Fiction* in the first half of 2025 (see details p.4) and would like feedback about development of this concept. The Public Affairs Reading Group has reduced the number of its meetings for next year due to dwindling numbers but if more members join we will go back to six per year. Christine Yeats hopes to be able to revive the Biography Group in 2025.

If you have any contributions for the next *Bulletin*, such as scholarly book notes, notes on exhibitions, films or plays, or interesting snippets of research, please send them to me by 30 **January 2025** at: cjennett@ozemail.com.au.

Stay safe and well. **Christine Jennett, *Bulletin* Editor**

ISAA 2024 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Thurs-Fri October 24-25

Conference Room National Library

Thursday: 8.45 am Registration

Sessions 1-3

5.00 pm Annual Lecture: Professor Mark McKenna *History and the Future of the Commonwealth: Manning Clarke's Vision of Australia 1962-1991*

Friday: Session 4 9.30 am

11.30 am ISAA Annual General Meeting

12.30 Lunch in Bookplate

NSW Chapter ISAA

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Dates for Your Diary

1 November: Work-in-Progress

22 November: *Doing Research*

5 December: ISAA Christmas
Lunch

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORK IN PROGRESS

Michelle Cavanagh

11.00am - 12.30pm 1 November

State Library of NSW



Love Letters to Kim

My friend Carol Flanagan – executor to the will of Kim Berendes – when clearing out Kim’s Manly house in readiness for sale, found four love letters written during the Second World War to Kim, all from men asking for her hand in marriage. Kim was a widow and long dead when Carol asked me to co-operate with her in writing Kim’s story. Once Carol gave me the bare bones of the story, and sent me copies of the love letters, I began to piece together bits of the jigsaw puzzle.

Kim hadn’t married any of her would-be suitors but did eventually marry a German – Rolf Horst Wilhelm Berendes – who came to Australia in 1936. By 1939 Rolf Berendes was interred, first in Bathurst, then Liverpool and eventually at the Tatura Internment Camp in Victoria where he was to remain until war’s end. Once released, in February 1946, Kim and Rolf married.

Carol and I decided that we would write Kim’s story from two different perspectives. Carol would document her friendship with Kim, and I would tell the story behind how Kim and Rolf got together. With this aim I purchased the files of Rolf Berendes from the National Archives of Australia. The numerous files included details of a Tribunal held in Melbourne in April 1941 during which Rolf Berendes applied to be released and which provided me with much needed information.

About the Speaker: Michelle Cavanagh, ISAA NSW Committee Member, Historian, Researcher, Writer

Author: *Margaret Holmes The Life and Times of an Australian Peace Campaigner*

Shen, Margaret (1942-1994) <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/shen-margaret-20708>



DOING RESEARCH MEETING

Helen Topor

22 November, 4 pm via Zoom

Title: ‘Researching the Life of Kazimierz Topor’

Abstract

The initial *raison d’être* for writing *Neither King nor Saint* was to capture personal memories of Kazimierz Topor, my father, and memories of conversations with my mother, Maria Elisabeth Schäfer, about her life with him in Germany and Australia. Memories were supplemented by salient information from German and Australian archives. A tantalising but fragmented picture emerged. To discover who my father really was, a variety of reliable primary and secondary sources were required to fill in knowledge

gaps and provide the context which governed my parents' lives. As the range of information sources widened and deepened, the original concept for the book and audience changed from primarily a family story, and therefore a limited audience, to that of a larger story Australians in general needed to know. Research revealed deeper, more disturbing truths and, consequently, a more important story resonating with the experiences and treatment of other migrant and refugee groups in Australia since 1950.

About the Speaker:

Helen Topor is an award-winning Canberra-based author, editor and Voluntary Guide at the National Gallery of Australia. Her publications include *Outdoor Games for Today's Kids* (2017), *Discovering Vermeer* (2018) and *Neither King nor Saint* (2022).



In 2023, *Neither King nor Saint* won a prestigious MARION ACT Notable Book Award for non-fiction. She has given authors talks on this book in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and regional cities. Helen has completed the second draft of her debut novel, *Catharina and Vermeer: The Painter and His Muse* (working title). This historical novel relies on research relating to 17th-century Dutch political, cultural, social and art history, the life and works of Johannes Vermeer, and an imaginative construction of the lives of the protagonists and antagonists. Conference papers for ISAA include 'Vermeer's domestic interiors: metaphors for the new Dutch woman and female interiority' (2021) and 'Weaving a non-celebratory migrant story' (2022). She writes articles on exhibitions and artworks in the NGA which are published in the NGA's monthly newsletter *News and Views*, a publication she also edits. Helen runs TopWords Writing and Editing Services which involves developing web content and ghost-writing. She edits academic theses, research reports and works of fiction and nonfiction. Memberships include the Independent Scholars Association of Australia, the Australian Society of Authors, MARION (ACT Writers Centre), the Canberra Society of Editors, the Canberra Writers Group and Alliance of Independent Authors.



THE POWER OF FICTION

From the time most of us can first remember family members taught us to read by using story books. As we grew up we progressed to reading novels (and encyclopaedias and magazines) to find out how other people lived, felt and the environments in which they went about their daily lives. For many of us reading novels became an abiding passion as we matured. Novels that introduce us to experiences more exciting than our own, to climates more challenging, or gave us insight into ways of understanding emotions that we might see in others but not ourselves. Fiction is a powerful form of literature. ISAA NSW invites members to submit abstracts to join in a workshop on the Power of Fiction in 2025 around June (date to be decided). If you are interested to speak for about twenty minutes on this topic please send an abstract of about 500 words to cjennett@ozemail.com.au so we can see what interest there is. We might also invite a couple of the literary societies to participate in this event. It is an evolving concept.



BOOK NOTES

PUBLIC AFFAIRS READING GROUP SEPTEMBER MEETING 2024

Song Spirals: Sharing women's wisdom of Country through songlines

Gay'Wu Group of Women

Allen & Unwin, 2019.

ISBN 978 1 76063 321 9

This book presents to readers why Aboriginal groups and their supporters say 'Always was and Always will be, Aboriginal land'! *Song Spirals* was written by four senior Yolgnu women (sisters) and 'their' daughter, with input from significant knowledge holding male members of their family/ies, along with three njapaki (non-Indigenous) women from New South Wales. The authors wrote as the Gay'wun Group of women after Katie, Sarah and Sandie had been adopted into the Yolgnu skin system. The skin system is the way in which people are given a name which is attached to responsibilities and duties in the community. It ensures social order is maintained in traditional Aboriginal communities that have no separate legal institutions, such as police. It works if people respect the traditional lore and carry out their responsibilities under it.

As the authors tell the readers, this system is taught to generations of Yolgnu through stories learnt through repetition of song spirals. They are spirals because the knowledge is revealed in layers on an 'eligible to know' basis. In this book they are sharing the most superficial layers of their people's knowledge with non-Indigenous people in the hope that the latter will come to understand the systems by which Yolgnu must live if they are to *flourish* and their culture is to remain strong. These Yolgnu families are the people who produced the musicians of Yothu Yindi, the angel-voiced Garramul and leaders Galarrwuy and Mandawuy Yunupingu and are descendants of Roy Marika. They made the first publicly acknowledged land rights claim in 1963 by sending bark petitions to the Australian Parliament. The man who raised these four senior women was Roy Marika, a major figure in their people's land rights battle on the national stage.

However, the book focuses on the culture that must be understood to appreciate the depth of association of Aboriginal people's attachment to their Country. It starts with the song their mother, Gaymala, (a very strong and knowledgeable Yolgnu woman) was saying in bed in 2005 as she knew she was going to die soon. She was speaking as the Whale spirit on its/her last journey. Yolgnu are salt water people and Gaymala was speaking about the whale, Wuymirri's journey to the depths of the ocean where she knows the hunters will be coming. They will cut her up and share her out with the people. Gaymala seems to understand herself as the Whale at this point and the daughters understand that she is saying she is dying.

The authors emphasise the importance of *milkarri*, an ancient ritual style of singing in the manner of keening. They say that song spirals have existed for a long time: 'they come from the land and they create it'. They keep on creating it, and the people, animals, plants, and all natural phenomena, such as rocks. When women sing *milkarri* they keep on creating everything in their country. In the book they share five song spirals: Waymirri, the Whale; Wiikun, the Gathering Clouds; Guwak, the Messenger Bird; Wititj, the Settling of the Serpent; and Gong-gurtha, the Keeper of the Fire. They show us how there is a division of labour in remembering the song cycles with different clans having their own versions of each song and with different individuals having specific roles in relation to the knowledge the songs hold. Some stories are women's business, some are men's business and some are the business only of senior men etc.

Overall, the really important takeaway from the book is an understanding of why it is that an Aboriginal person will refer to unacceptable developments, such as mining, on their land as physically harming them. The land/Country, people, animals and all natural phenomena are connected; they are all 'one', and there is a law which must be respected and the responsibilities for upholding it belong to all Yolgnu (in this case). Rituals and songs must be undertaken in the correct way, at a certain correct time, by the correct

people. The people must share responsibilities and maintain balance in their relationships by negotiating and giving and taking.

For the non-Indigenous reader the circular, repetitive style of exposition can seem timeconsuming but it is necessary to remember that oral traditions survive for thousands of years over many generations of people and contain information that is more reliable than those used to Western methods of passing on information might expect. Overall, the book is an enjoyable read but best not a hurried one. It is to be hope that non-Indigenous readers will understand what a generous gift it is! **Christine Jennett**

King Leopold's Ghostwriter: The Creation of Persons and States in the Nineteenth Century

Andrew Fitzmaurice

Princeton University Press, Princeton (2021)

ISBN 9780691148694

Andrew Fitzmaurice's biography of the nineteenth-century English Victorian jurist Sir Travis Twiss (1809-1897) is a thorough examination of the life and career of the man who played a significant role in crafting the narratives and justifications for King Leopold II of Belgium's colonial ambitions in the Congo.

King Leopold's Ghostwriter reveals Twiss to be a complex figure who excelled in various fields. He was a marriage and ecclesiastical lawyer, a prominent theorist of international law, and a collaborator and friend of Prince Metternich. Additionally, he served as the Vicar General of the Diocese of Canterbury, held the position of Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, and acted as the Queen's Advocate in the Admiralty Court.

In 1871 however, his career came to a dramatic halt. His 1862 marriage to a 22-year-old Belgian prostitute, Marie van Lynnseele, whom he had sought to reinvent as a woman of suitably noble birth, was exposed by a solicitor named Alexander Chaffers. Disgraced, Twiss resigned his positions, and the couple moved to Switzerland.

Like Phoenix rising from the ashes however, Twiss attended the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-1885 as an unofficial adviser to the British delegation. It was here that the major European powers negotiated and formalised claims to territory in Africa. Twiss also found new employment as legal advisor to King Leopold of Belgium, who was seeking to have the Congo recognised as a new state under his personal authority.

As Leopold was seeking to present himself as a benevolent ruler focused on civilising the region, Twiss – the ghostwriter – along with others, helped shape the propaganda that portrayed his actions in a positive light. As Fitzmaurice reminds us, Twiss helped construct the public persona of Leopold, masking the brutal realities of colonial exploitation and violence that occurred during his rule and afterwards. **Christine Yeats**



EXHIBITION NOTE

Hardy Wilson's Old Colonial Architecture 1924-2024

University of Sydney Library

William Hardy Wilson was an architect, artist, author. A framed copy of Hardy Wilson's parchment map, *The Cow Pasture Road*, hangs on the wall at the Camden Library and recently came to my attention. Campbelltown-born architect, artist, and writer William Hardy Wilson is little known in the local area and yet has a significant place in Australian architectural history.

Wilson was a complex character. An outstanding architect with an artistic eye, an anti-modernist, and a colonial. He embraced interwar fascism and was influenced by the ideas of thinkers like Hegel, Bergson, and Nietzsche. (Keri) Biographer Zeny Edwards has called Wilson a visionary, an aesthete, a critic and a racist. (Edwards)

In the early 1900s, Wilson trained as an architect at Sydney Technical College, took instruction from artist Sydney Long and made friends with George Lambert and Arthur Streeton. (Apperly)

Wilson travelled to Europe and the USA and became interested in the colonial revival style architecture of the eastern States. From this experience, he became an enthusiastic advocate of Australian Georgian colonial architecture.

Honouring this legacy, the University of Sydney Library has mounted an exhibition marking the 100th anniversary of Wilson's seminal work *Old Colonial Architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania* (1924).

The '[Hardy Wilson's Old Colonial Architecture 1924-2024](#)' exhibition aims to draw attention to the book's creation, examine its 'enduring presence and influence in Australian architecture' and contextualise it 'in Wilson's biography and wider body of published work'. (Exhibition Notes)

The exhibition raises questions 'about how we evaluate his work considering his outmoded and odious social views, which became apparent in his later writing' from the perspective of the 21st century. (Exhibition Notes)

The displays include 50 plates from *Old Colonial Architecture*; Wilson's other publications, biographies and works influenced by Wilson.

Part of the exhibition was a symposium organised by the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning, called 'Hardy Wilson and the Colonial Imagination'. The symposium considered how Hardy Wilson's *Old Colonial Architecture* has become 'one of only a handful of books that are absolutely essential to understanding architectural history'. (Symposium Notes)

According to architect Hector Abrahams, Wilson's drawings were done in a 'romantic' style, slightly 'out of focus'. The subject matter is interesting - a cemetery monument here, a front door there. Abrahams asked, 'Was there any order to the presentation of the drawings in the book?' Answering his question, he says, 'There is no honest answer'.

The University of Sydney Library exhibition was launched on Thursday, 22 August, and will be displayed on level 2 of Fisher Library until the end of semester 1, 2025. **Ian Willis**

References

Apperly, Richard E. 1990. 'Wilson, William Hardy (1881–1955)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Canberra.

Edwards, Zeny 2001. *William Hardy Wilson: artist, architect, orientalist, visionary*. Watermark, Surry Hills, N.S.W. Garsington.

Keri, Adrian 2021. *Australian Literary Fascists, 1905-1945: A Comparative Case Study into the Development of Fascist Ideology in Australia*, MA Thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia, pp. 63-140.

Verbalising Can Clarify

Do you wonder what other people might think of your ideas?

Tired of keeping them to yourself?

Want some genuine, helpful, and considered discussion of *your* work-in-progress?

If an ISAA Work-in-Progress meeting interests you, please contact:

cjennett@ozemail.com.au

Book Notes Exhibition Notes Film Notes

Research Snippets